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Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2005
New York, 29 June-27 July 2005
Agenda item 14
Social and human rights questions

Identical letters dated 24 August 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to inform you of the Doha International Conference on Ageing, which was held in Doha, Qatar, from 4 to 6 April 2005. This Conference was a manifestation of the State of Qatar's ongoing concern for its elderly population, which occupies a privileged position in Qatari society. The Declaration of the Conference is attached (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 63 and 64, as well as of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 14.

(*Signed*) Nassir Abdulaziz **Al-Nasser**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 24 August 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council

[Original: Arabic]

Declaration of the Doha International Conference on Ageing in View of Present-Day Changes

Doha, 4 to 6 April 2005

Under the generous sponsorship Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misnad, President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and wife of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the beloved Emir of Qatar, the State of Qatar hosted the first international conference on older persons, the Doha International Conference on Ageing in View of Present-Day Changes.

Doha, the capital, was the venue of this splendid event, which took place from 4 to 6 April 2005. The purpose of the Conference was to gain awareness of the principal field studies and analyse the most important statistical data and international, regional and national legislation with a view to arriving at a set of scientific indicators and concrete recommendations for bridging the generational knowledge gap and achieving communication and fruitful human-resource utilization for the elderly under conditions of comprehensive care and in accordance with standards of excellence stipulated by the laws and the related social and insurance regulations. Such care requires the adoption of a strategy based on mainstreaming concern for the elderly in cultural dialogue and media discourse as well as in educational curricula. This will help the world to shift from an attitude of dealing with the issues of the elderly as sensitive matters towards one of positive intervention in those issues, in line with the social transformations taking place today that are constantly affecting lifestyles. Such new attitudes will be reflected in the ways in which one deals with this important segment of our societies.

Accordingly, the Conference was intended to sensitize the international community to the need to formulate a realistic, forward-looking vision to ensure the continuity of the relationship of older persons with their societies. Such a vision must comprise a well-defined strategy and clear concepts of the sharing of that segment of the population in community development efforts in every way, through the adoption of methodological frameworks derived from the overall findings of the studies and research carried out in senior citizens and from the results of local, regional and international experience in the area of participation of this group in development and its care.

Fortunately, the various Conference participants reached out in order to draw, from among the lofty principles vouchsafed in the revealed religions, the principle of desiring to instil a spirit of love, appreciation, reverence and piety in the souls of the members of each generation towards their parents and older persons.

As the Conference looked at the concrete application of those principles, there emerged a universal vision confirming both the importance of recognizing the need to accord older persons a prominent status and the importance of respecting and

taking advantage of their experience and knowledge. This can only be achieved through efforts to effect a major change in the lives of older persons so as to turn to take advantage of their profound experience. This means a new role for them in society that implies providing work opportunities for all who so desire and exercising the necessary concern and care, so as to eliminate the factors that tend to marginalize this group.

In the light of what has been said and in full recognition of all the international covenants that have dealt with ageing, the Conference set about shedding light on the main contexts of care and concern for the elderly and their participation in development.

The Conference participants discussed the following principal components:

I. Religion

This component involved an examination of the guidelines set forth in the holy scriptures of the principal revealed religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this connection it was recommended that international and regional bodies and organizations should strive to arrive at an all-inclusive formulation of existing covenants on the elderly that should include the consecration of religious values, moral teachings and life experience relating to their care and respect for them.

II. The social component

Under this theme the Conference discussed the most important principles and the fundamental rights and freedoms that represent the pillars of an all-inclusive society — a society for all ages — in which the elderly participate fully and effectively, without any discrimination and on an equal footing with all other segments of the population, and from which anything that might stand in the way of their participation in all facets and activities of the community or constitute discrimination against them has been eliminated.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of adopting every possible measure to support and strengthen the bonds and solidarity between the various social groups through equality and reciprocity between generations.

III. Health

The most important health issues facing elderly persons around the world were highlighted under this heading. A number of regional health problems were discussed and the importance of efforts towards publishing a journal of gerontology/geriatrics in all the countries and specialized academies of the world was emphasized, as well as the need to establish a medical policy geared towards early detection of geriatric diseases with a view to their prevention.

IV. Culture and the media

This component showed the historical dimensions of the care of and regard for older persons in Arab culture and in other cultures throughout the world. It revealed the outstanding intellectual contributions of elderly persons of learning in the countries of the world. Emphasis here was on issues relating to age as reflected in television dramas and television broadcasts intended for the elderly.

There has been a world-wide call for the creation of what is referred to as a senior citizens' culture and media, which aims, through educational and information means, to fill the cultural needs of this group and entertain them with literary and artistic works that are apposite to their concerns, their education and their culture.

V. Legislation

This theme was the subject of a discussion of social policy on the elderly, social insurance laws and their role in providing care for elderly persons.

International and regional organizations and bodies urged the carrying out of advanced studies and comprehensive, periodic reviews of the prevailing systems of social security with a view to broadening the range of individuals benefiting from them and furthering the rights and advantages guaranteed by them. They also drew attention to the need to create a common global formula for the fundamental principles of social security to guarantee the abolition of poverty among the elderly by ensuring a minimum periodic income with stepped increases, to make it possible to meet the demands of a life of dignity.

Final recommendations of the Declaration

The Conference participants call for:

1. The preparation of a comprehensive study with a view to a common global formulation to serve as a basis for international covenants concerning older persons, guaranteeing the consecration of religious and moral values that call for the care of and respect for such persons;

2. Efforts to correct and modify negative attitudes in the direction of a concept of old age not as reflecting weakness or incapacity but rather as an important stage in the life of a human being that is distinguished by maturity and wisdom and represents a cultural patrimony which links generations and elevates societies;

3. The establishment of care programmes, policies and plans that contribute to the preparation of a supportive environment for older persons that promotes their integration within their families, their social environment and public life;

4. Efforts to ensure that the elderly person continues to live among the members of his or her family and is provided with necessary means for a life of dignity amid the warmth of the family and the intimate rapport that ties its members together;

5. The conducting of an advanced study of social insurance systems, to be published internationally, with a view to making the retirement age optional, based on the nature of the work concerned; abolishing the prohibition against combined pension entitlement and income from work; and eliminating all kinds of discrimination based on sex, ancestry, language or religion with regard to the enjoyment of retirement pensions, social security and other types of insurance;

6. Concern with the establishment of medical units for physical, mental and social geriatric health both in faculties of medicine and in psychology, social and social-services departments in Arab and other universities throughout the world, to

contribute towards enhancing the provision of the various services offered to elderly persons;

7. A focus on the literary work of elderly persons that records their invaluable experience and expertise and expresses what they have undergone in various literary forms, such as the short story, the novel, plays, poetry, etc.;

8. Concern with recording the biographies of elderly persons who have made outstanding contributions;

9. The development of a culture of friendship with the elderly and encouragement of intimate human relations between young people and children and elderly persons;

10. The establishment of a media plan for dramatic productions relating to the elderly to address and respond to their needs and deal with their issues and problems; deepen the awareness of society of the importance of caring for the elderly; reject all kinds of negative attitudes towards them that may exist within the community; embody a positive image of the elderly as a group representing wisdom, experience and noble traditional values; and depict them as citizens actively participating in the affairs of their families and their societies;

11. A review of educational curricula and school books at all stages of learning, especially at the primary-school level, in order to bring out clearly the positive aspects of old age and tie it to earlier stages of a person's life as being a stage characterized by maturity and experience;

12. The expansion of educative courses and programmes and concern with providing the requisite information for embarking upon the phase of early preparation for retirement and old age based on the adoption of healthy habits and sound means of prevention, in accordance with clearly defined methods, in order to afford elderly persons an opportunity for appropriate preparation and planning for the transition to that stage of life without, or in any case with a minimum of, adverse repercussions;

13. A study of the cultural needs of the elderly and attention to providing for those needs in a way that enables them to benefit fully therefrom through the provision of the necessary appliances and equipment for enhancing their moving, hearing and seeing capacities;

14. Efforts to create effective means of cooperation and coordination between organizations that operate in the field of care for senior citizens and concerned entities in cultural and artistic forums, public libraries, clubs and associations in order that those entities may qualify and train specialists in understanding older persons, recognizing and fulfilling their various cultural needs and providing library, cultural and information services to them wherever they may be, whether at home, in senior care facilities or in hospitals;

15. The establishment of model scientific institutes and foundations to carry out research and studies in the field of geriatrics; to establish medical policies aimed at disease prevention in the elderly; and to qualify and train senior medical and social staff and their assistants in admitting and providing medical and social care services of all kinds to elderly subjects, administering treatment and managing physical and mental health problems in this group;

16. The establishment of information centres; the building of databases on all matters relating to ageing, which can be updated and upgraded from time to time so as to remain abreast of new developments around the world; and their connection to regional information networks;

17. Initiatives towards the inclusion of geriatrics in the curricula of medical schools in Arab countries and elsewhere throughout the world;

18. The conducting of specialized studies and research to determine the characteristics of diseases of the elderly in the different regions of the world and the features of the services which must be provided for them. Of considerable importance here is the need to study and improve the process of evaluating the effects of chronic diseases on elderly subjects who suffer from them as well as on members of their families;

19. The establishment and adoption of strict, specific controls and conditions for placing elderly persons in nursing homes, permitting them to be discharged whenever it is better for them either from the social standpoint or for reasons of health;

20. The establishment of rehabilitation programmes for elderly persons with disabilities to afford them the minimum personal capacities required for their insertion into society, within a physical environment that facilitates their movements both at home and outside;

21. Efforts to ensure that the senior citizens are granted special privileges that guarantee their ability to travel from country to country at the lowest possible cost;

22. The granting to seniors of exemptions and facilities that relieve them of the burden of taxes and rates in all areas.

And in conclusion ...

We address to the world at large, with all its organizations and institutions, an appeal for:

- The drafting of a universal declaration of the rights of the elderly in line with the international instruments containing universal declarations of the rights of the child and of women, to be promulgated on the International Day of Older Persons, all countries being invited to adopt it on that day. Additional protocols must be drafted to codify international means, binding on States, for achieving social justice for this group. Social policies must be adopted to prepare the world's peoples to welcome and include the elderly in development programmes, guaranteeing that they are not subject to any form of neglect, mistreatment, violence or marginalization;
- The adoption of 7 April 2006 (World Health Day) as Senior Sports Day, in view of the major role played by sports in health.